

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE  
CLEVELAND, OHIO 44106  
TELEPHONE (216) 421-7340

November 1976

FOR RELEASE ON RECEIPT

With the conquest of northern India by Muslim invaders in the 16th century came an extraordinary succession of rulers under whose patronage a rich new mode of painting -- the Mughal style -- developed and flourished for more than two centuries. The style, which came into existence during the reign of the third and greatest of the Mughal emperors, Akbar (1556-1605), survives mainly in illustrations for books and in individual miniature paintings produced for Mughal nobility.

An exhibition on view at the Cleveland Museum of Art from November 9 to December 19, 1976, examines the genesis of Mughal painting, focusing on a key document, a 16th-century illustrated Mughal manuscript of the Tuti-nama, or Tales of a Parrot, now in the collection of the Cleveland Museum.

A critical analysis of the 218 miniature paintings in this unique manuscript, discovered in 1962, has just been completed by Pramod Chandra, Professor of Indian Art at the University of Chicago. His views regarding the significance of the manuscript and the light it sheds on the origins of Mughal painting are contained in a volume of scholarly commentary intended for use with a facsimile edition of the Tuti-nama manuscript published this fall. An abridged version of his arguments is included in an 88-page illustrated catalogue which accompanies this exhibition.

The exhibition, planned to coincide with the publication of the facsimile and volume of commentary, has been organized by the David and Alfred Smart Gallery of the University of Chicago under the direction of Professor Chandra and his assistant, Daniel J. Ehnbom. It consists of 50 illustrated folios from the Cleveland Tuti-nama and 32 Indian and Mughal paintings roughly contemporary with the Tuti-nama.

(more)

The origins of the Mughal style have long been a subject of speculation. Since the Mughals' cultural heritage was Persian and the first artists employed at their courts were Persian, it was natural to suppose that the style evolved from Persian painting.

However, the earliest known work in the Mughal idiom, the illustrated manuscript of the Hamza-nama, a Persian epic recounting the adventures of the Amir Hamza, the legendary uncle of the prophet Mohammed, while clearly indebted to Persian miniature traditions, is more naturalistic and expressive, exhibiting a lively movement and feeling for spacial depth not found in Persian painting.

Perhaps, scholars suggested, the tastes of the Mughal emperors, particularly Akbar, during whose reign the Hamza-nama was completed, accounted for the distinctive character of Mughal painting. They also considered the probability of influences from Indian schools of painting, but visual evidence of a connection between Indian and Mughal styles was lacking.

With the discovery of the Cleveland Tuti-nama manuscript, dated to the early reign of Akbar, circa 1560-1565, the gap between Indian and Mughal painting was bridged.

Study of the 218 miniatures in the manuscript revealed that they had been painted by more than 40 artists working in a variety of styles, ranging from indigenous Indian idioms to a fully formed Mughal style. What is more significant, although each painting is executed by a single artist, individual paintings frequently contain elements of more than one style. For example, in the same work, realistically modeled figures in the Mughal manner may occur with landscape and architectural details derived from Indian schools of painting. This suggests to Professor Chandra that the painters working on the Tuti-nama tended to borrow freely from one another, experimenting with different styles in an effort to achieve a new idiom.

(more)

All of this indicates, according to Professor Chandra, that "the manuscript represents the earliest and most formative phases of Akbar's atelier, actually demonstrating the processes by which the work of non-Mughal artists was transformed into the Mughal style proper."

The various Indian painting traditions that contributed to the formation of the Mughal style are illustrated in this exhibition by a series of paintings from Western Indian Jain religious texts, Hindu texts, such as the Bhagavata Purana (which describes the exploits of the Hindu god Krishna), and romances and poetic works in an Indo-Persian style.

Works in the Mughal style, arranged chronologically, include a painting from the Hamza-nama, and a Portrait of a Young Indian Scholar, dated around 1560-1565, by Mir Sayyid Ali, a Persian master who supervised the earliest work of the Hamza-nama.

Displayed with three Tuti-nama miniatures are three paintings representing the same subjects from a later (circa 1580) Mughal manuscript of the Tuti-nama, known as the A. Chester Beatty Tuti-nama (from the collection in which most of the pages are found.)

Folios from the Tuti-nama illustrated by Basavana, one of the greatest artists of the Mughal school, are exhibited with a work done by the artist around 1595, The Poet Spurned, and a large and colorful painting in which he collaborated, a leaf from the Akbar-nama (Book of Akbar), depicting the arrest of the insolent courtier, Shah Abu al-Maali, an incident which took place during Akbar's reign.

With the exception of two paintings drawn from the collection of the Cleveland Museum, works displayed for purposes of comparison with the Tuti-nama are from the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Edward Binney 3rd and other private collectors.

(more)

The Tuti-nama manuscript in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art is the oldest and most complete surviving manuscript of this popular Oriental classic. It originally consisted of 341 folios, of which six folios are missing and seven are in private collections. The exciting circumstances of its discovery and acquisition by the Cleveland Museum of Art are described by Cleveland Museum Director Sherman E. Lee in both the introduction to the exhibition catalogue and the introduction to Professor Chandra's volume of scholarly commentary.

The text of the Tuti-nama manuscript is that of Ziya al-Din Nakhshabi, a free translation into Persian, completed in 1330, of the Sanskrit Sukasaptati (Seventy Tales of a Parrot). The tales, reduced by Nakhshabi to fifty-two, consist of animal fables, folk tales, and sophisticated yarns of amorous adventure. A synopsis of each of the tales associated with the miniatures on exhibition is given in the exhibition catalogue.

A full translation of all fifty-two tales in the Tuti-nama (the first complete translation into English) will be available in early 1977.

The Cleveland Tuti-nama Manuscript and the Origins of Mughal Painting is installed in the Indian paintings gallery on the Museum's ground floor. Talks on the exhibition will be given in the gallery on Wednesday, November 17, and Sunday, November 21, at 1:30 p.m.

A slide-illustrated lecture, entitled "Some Painters of the Tuti-nama Manuscript," will be given by Professor Chandra in the Museum's Recital Hall on Friday, November 19, at 3:30 p.m.

Following its Cleveland showing, the exhibition will travel to the Smart Gallery at the University of Chicago where it will be on view from January 12 through February 27, 1977.